

III. SUMMARY OF INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The 1987 State Parks Act defines the purposes of the state parks system. It establishes that:

The State of North Carolina offers unique archaeologic, geologic, biologic, scenic and recreation resources. These resources are part of the heritage of the people of this State. The heritage of a people should be preserved and managed by those people for their use and for the use of their visitors and descendants.

It further provides that:

Park lands are to be used by the people of this State and their visitors in order to promote understanding of and pride in the natural heritage of this State.

One of the best methods of meeting these purposes is through environmental education. The definition of environmental education as set forth in *The North Carolina Environmental Education Plan* is given below.

Environmental Education is an active process that increases awareness, knowledge and skills that result in understanding, commitment, informed decisions and constructive action to ensure stewardship of all interdependent parts of the earth's environment.

Jones Lake State Park protects two water-filled Carolina bays – Jones and Salters lakes. Through its environmental education and interpretation program, the park staff encourages visitors to learn about Carolina bays and the unique plants and animals that live in and around them. Many of the Carolina bays in North Carolina and elsewhere have been drained and filled; few undisturbed examples remain. The main thrust of the park's education program is to increase public awareness of Carolina bays and inspire their preservation.

Jones Lake State Park has three primary themes and five secondary themes. In priority order, the primary themes are Carolina bay ecology, the mysterious origins of Carolina bays, and park history.

PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Carolina Bay Ecology and Conservation

This primary theme includes both the physical and biological characteristics of Carolina bays – their geomorphology, water quality and natural communities. Major exhibits in and around the park visitor's center illustrate physical features common to most bays and their associated natural communities. These communities include wet pine flatwoods, the lake and natural shoreline, pond pine woodland or bay forest, and the xeric sandhill scrub on the bay's sand rim. Park programs and interpretive exhibits highlight the unique plants and animals of the Carolina bays and their fascinating interrelationships. The park's Environmental Education Learning

Experience (EELE) provides hands-on activities that allow students to study the water quality of Jones Lake and discover reasons for its low biodiversity. Through the EELE, exhibits and interpretive programs, the park staff explains the importance of protecting and maintaining Carolina bays.

Origin of Carolina Bays

Most visitors are intrigued by the mysterious origins of the Carolina bays. The park staff provides programs and exhibits that demonstrate when and how bays may have formed and evolved to their current conditions. Although scientific theories are highlighted, the visitors are encouraged to use their imaginations to develop theories of their own.

Park History

The local community has a strong interest in the history of Jones Lake State Park. Opening in 1939, it was the first North Carolina state park for African Americans and remained segregated until the mid 1960s. Prior to its designation as a state park, the area's longleaf pine forests were exploited by the turpentine industry, and the Atlantic white cedars were logged. The federal government bought most of the submarginal farmland around Jones Lake by the late 1930s, and the Resettlement Administration oversaw the development of roads, trails and buildings to create the park. Park history is presented through interpretive programs and exhibits in the visitor's center.

SECONDARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Secondary themes for the park support and embellish the primary themes, and are listed below.

- Life on the Sand Rim
- Role of Prescribed Fire in Maintaining Natural Communities
- Carnivorous Plants
- Endangered Species
- Water Safety

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